

FOCUS ON FAITH

IT'S A FREE GIFT

How many of us I wonder have either had a telephone call – or probably more likely these days, a text message – or a letter telling us we've struck it lucky and won a prize in a competition that we never knew we'd entered? Or how about a mailing from one of those well known companies that offers the chance of winning a cool quarter of million pounds if you'll only just subscribe to their magazine? "Someone's got to win it" the headline shouts, "Don't let the prize go to someone else because you don't send back your prize draw entry!" As they say on the Lottery, "You've got to be in it to win it!"

Most of us probably have a healthy disregard for these so-called offers. After all there is no such thing as a free lunch is there? Somebody somewhere has to pay for someone's good fortune in winning the top prize but the odds are usually stacked up against it being you or me who'll be the beneficiary. Very few people I've come across actually believe you get something for nothing.

I was thinking about this in relation to how we tend to treat each other and life in general – I really ought to get out more! But seriously we've become conditioned in talking about our rights and what's owed to us more than what we put in. Think this through with me for a moment.

- We get through another year so we reward ourselves – or hopefully others reward us – with a birthday or anniversary gift.
- A child does well in his or her exams, they graduate from university or even pass their driving test and they get cards and congratulatory gifts.
- You get an invitation to a wedding which comes with a note saying "presents can be chosen from our gift list at so-and-so department store.com" on the presumption that you'll get the happy couple something very special.
- We go to work and expect to get paid at the end of the month. It comes as no surprise to us that our employers pay us, because we've earned it. And when the annual pay awards are due, we expect to get a rise – it's our right.

The free gift of eternal life that Jesus offers cost Him everything

Gifts cost the giver.

We pay our money to buy the present and then gift wrap it so that it looks nice. Sometimes we accidentally forget to remove the price tag just to make sure the recipient knows how much it cost.

Or is it possibly to make sure that when it's our turn they buy us something of equal or more value? Again it would be our right to receive something as good in return.

Probably all of us can quote the Bible verse (Acts 20 verse 35) which says "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" But, as often happens, the verse is usually taken out of context. The Apostle Paul credits Jesus as having said these words although I can't actually find anywhere in the four Gospels where it's recorded He did say them. However Paul is speaking in the context of working hard to provide for himself, not expecting anyone to go out of their way to give him anything and encouraging people to look out for those who are less well-off. He was more concerned about what he was contributing rather than getting what was due to him.

We're coming up to Easter, probably the most significant festival in the Christian calendar. And here is a free gift that we don't deserve, didn't earn and really have no right to receive. God's Son, Jesus, gave Himself for us, dying the most agonising death ever invented on the basis that He loves you and me unconditionally. Human cruelty was demonstrated towards Him in the most vicious way imaginable and yet, even as He is drawing His last breath, He still manages to plead, "*Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing.*"

The free gift of eternal life that Jesus offers cost Him everything. The Bible tells us He gave up the glories of heaven to become like us; He shared our humanity and eventually died in order to bring us into a relationship with God. Yes there is the miracle of the resurrection but to me the real miracle is that we don't have to earn our place in heaven. Jesus did it all – for free.

This is one free gift I'd advise you not to miss out on.

Find out more about the miracle of the free gift of life this Easter at a church near you. Log onto www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk where you'll find links to websites and contact details for the various Christian churches in the Bridgnorth area.



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